

Dr [REDACTED]
Honorary Secretary of Council

Mr Kevin McLoughlin
Senior Coroner for the Coroner area of West Yorkshire

26 January 2022

Dear Mr McLoughlin,

Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths - touching on the death of Alexander George Theodossiadis

Thank you for your letter of 3 December 2021. I am responding on behalf of the Royal College of General Practitioners as Honorary Secretary to Council. Firstly, can I convey our condolences to the family and friends of Alexander Theodossiadis. I was saddened to read of Alexander's passing.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the largest membership organisation in the United Kingdom solely for GPs. It aims to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and to act as the 'voice' of GPs on issues concerned with education; training; research; and clinical standards. Founded in 1952, the RCGP has just over 54,000 members who are committed to improving patient care, developing their own skills and promoting general practice as a discipline.

You have asked the RCGP about GP reception staff and their training for the role. In particular whether receptionists could ask more questions of patients who do not request urgent appointments. The report details that the events leading to the inquest took place before the Coronavirus Pandemic. The custom and practice at the time was to offer and book the first available appointment without questioning of the patient. If the patient wanted a more urgent appointment they could request one. Reception staff are not clinically trained although they do have some knowledge. They would signpost rather than perform clinical triage. They had access to the GP and could ask for different priority if requested by the patient.

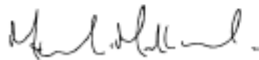
At that time the service was already having difficulty providing sufficient appointments. As the system came under progressive strain urgent patients were prioritised. As a consequence, the length of time to a non-urgent appointment increased. Patients could book an appointment with a GP without explanation if they wished. When that was a choice of urgent today or unrestricted in three or four days it was acceptable. No one in the system wanted there to be a three week wait for routine appointments. If the patient had asked for an urgent appointment that day, one might have been provided but the narrative suggests that the patient felt he had a viral illness at that time.

Since the pandemic the custom and practice has completely changed. Detailed information is requested from patients when they request appointments. The information given is reviewed and frequently a telephone call arranged with a clinician to consult with the patient. There are also different options to reach the practice now. Direct attendance without a booked face to face appointment is discouraged but telephone and email are more available. After an initial dip in first lockdown the number of requests for consultations has increased. There are figures from NHS Digital (Experimental Figures and therefore caution is advised) that show a 10% increase in appointments between October 2019 and October 2021. Patients now receive clinician triage or an appointment as a way of dealing efficiently with the increased numbers of appointment requests. This has meant that the option of waiting and direct booking with a named professional including a GP is no longer available. When patients are first consulted by telephone those that need them are brought down for face-to-face consultations.

The system has moved from requests to receptionists to clinicians as initial point of consultation and triage. This is not the same as the suggested option of receptionists asking for information but should provide a higher level of clinical safety and service. There is no formal requirement for practices to consult in this way and they could still offer open face to face appointments, but most do not. The telephone clinician appointments are usually more rapidly available. This is in line with your request for more information to be gathered from patients when booking appointments.

I trust that this reply is helpful and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Dr [REDACTED]
Honorary Secretary
Royal College of General Practitioners